

# FJC MAGAZINE



JULY 2012 • VOLUME 5 • ISSUE 3





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**On The Cover:**  
Our TRD with CVT  
overlooking Sedona, AZ





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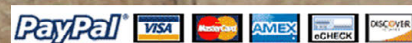


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# DRAKE

OFF ROAD



## FROM THE PUBLISHER

The early summer has not been the most exciting for many Coloradoans. Several of our good friends in Colorado Springs were evacuated due to the Waldo Canyon Fire, while other fires continue to burn massive amounts of forest across Colorado and the west.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to all those affected by the fires, and especially the brave men and women risking their lives to save homes, forest, and property. If you're going to the FJ Summit, please consider giving to the special firefighting fund that will be setup. Every penny counts in supporting this effort.

That being said, we're very excited about the largest issue of FJC Magazine to date. We have so many amazing articles in this issue from a several new contributors.

Our new associate editor needs no introduction: Paul Thompson from The Last Great Road Trip has joined the team and will be instrumental in taking FJC Magazine to the next level.

Bill has built one of the coolest custom FJCs we've seen in a long time, read on to find out what ZEE means.

Pat Haggerty from Right Channel Radios has contributed a great primer for anyone who has yet to purchase a CB radio as well.

Our new Associate Creative Director, Kimberly Proffitt comes to us with years of experience in the design world. Her expertise has been immediately helpful to our publication, and we're lucky to have her on the team.

We hope you enjoy this issue of FJC Magazine, and we look forward to seeing everyone in Ouray in a few weeks!

Until next time, Tread Lightly, Stay The Trail, and HAVE FUN!



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# New & Noteworthy

## Ruger Trailers

Ever think of building up an off road trailer

from an old, worn out military trailer? We've been thinking about that type of project for years. We've seen many trailer manufacturers come and go, but many are just too expensive for basic options or are overbuilt for most uses. Last month we had the opportunity to visit with Steve Seigler from Ruger Trailers just outside Denver, Colorado.



The Ruger C416 base model is a great basic trailer for most 4x4 users. It's light, comes with a lid included in the \$2,995 base price, and has ample storage for camping/overlanding supplies.



The trailer seems like it's very well built, and the 3500lb axle with 1750lb springs on each side ensure your gear will be safe and sound.

Ruger has asked us to take a closer look at this trailer, so we'll have it at the FJ Summit later this month, and look for more coverage in both FJC Magazine and Tacoma Magazine in the near future.

[WWW.RUGERTRAILERS.COM](http://WWW.RUGERTRAILERS.COM)

## TREKPAK

For years we've been struggling with camera bags, backpacks, and the need to get at our gear in a hurry on the trail. Well, just before the Overland Expo a

little Kickstarter project popped up called Trek Pak.



Georgia and her team have solved camera storage issues for all adventurers once and for all! The Trek Pak is an insert that works with certain backpacks (more models coming), hard sided cases, or your tradi-

tional camera bag. Simply adjust the Trek Pak to fit your gear and secure it in place with the clips. Now you can hike, ride, wheel, or whatever you need without worrying about your gear.

Look for more in-depth coverage of the Trek Pak in Tacoma Magazine's September issue.



[WWW.TREKPAK.COM](http://WWW.TREKPAK.COM)



# EVENTS

## 2012 FJ Summit

Dates: July 18-22 2012

Location: Ouray, CO

Contact: <http://www.fjsummit.org>

## Black Hills Cruiser Classic

Dates: July 18-21 2012

Location: Black Hills, SD

Contact: <http://www.dakotacruisers.com>

## 2012 SedonaFest

Dates: August 17-19 2012

Location: Sedona, AZ

Contact: <http://www.sedonafest.com/>

## 2012 Thrill on the Hill

Dates: Labor Day Weekend, 2012

Location: Cloudcroft, NM

Contact: <http://www.nmfjrally.com>

## Rising Sun Rally

Dates: August 25th 2012

Location: Rubicon Trail, CA

Contact: <http://www.risingsun4x4club.org/>

## Tall Corn Cruiser Classic

Dates: August 22-26 2012

Location: Hamilton, IA

Contact: <http://bit.ly/My9PhD/>

## Cruisin The Woods 2012

Dates: September 29, 2012

Location: Browns Camp, OR

Contact: <http://tlca.org/events>

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on Event Calendar

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# OVERLAND EXPO 2012

*By Shane Williams*

*Photography by Jim Akers, Angie Williams & Shane Williams*

Goal Zero FJC rescue



## **Get Outfitted. Get Trained. Get Inspired. Get Going!**

That was the motto for the 2012 Overland Expo, held at Mormon Lake, AZ in late May. The expo has been going strong for several years and has continued to grow since its inception. With over 5000 attendees and 140+ vendors showing their latest and greatest products, not to mention world class training and the top names in overlanding, there really was something for everyone at this event.

before going to work. Apparently the overland crowd was very eager to visit Mormon Lake: by the time we arrived the primary camping area was nearly full, and while only a few vendors were setup, most were already in the area. It was clear that this would be a great trip!

At last count, Jim and I took over 700 photos during the three days of the Expo. What's included in this article is a small sample of our coverage, so for more see the June 2012 issue of Tacoma Magazine and our Flickr page.

## **Training**

Courses were scheduled and published well in advance of the Expo so attendees could sign up for their top choices. The most influential people in the overlanding industry were on hand to share their knowledge and help both experienced and new enthusiasts get the information they need for their

Aces FJ on three wheels



Jim Akers (Managing Editor for Tacoma Magazine) and I arrived mid-afternoon on Thursday to a nearly full house. Since the event didn't officially start until Friday, we figured arriving Thursday would let us setup and relax

Brenden enjoying camp on the north rim





next adventure. Altogether there were over 85 classes held by 65 instructors on topics ranging from solar power to advanced driving techniques. Land Rover of North America built a custom overland track and brought several vehicles for attendees to drive. Personal vehicles were also allowed on the track, with a Land Rover instructor riding shotgun, to ensure everyone got great training and stayed safe.

Of course we weren't able to attend every class, but we managed to find some great instruction. The rollover recovery demonstration was among the most valuable, and garnered one of the largest crowds of the Expo. Another interesting face is that most attendees at the roof top tent class given by Roualeyn de Haas from Bundu Gear were very new to overlanding, and off highway travel in general. This just shows how much the overland world is growing!

A great aspect of the Expo is that there is plenty of training for experienced and inexperienced people alike. Although, the advanced courses have remained the same for the last few years, they're a great refresher. One of the attendees we chatted with suggested multi-day overland routes with training included as a great option for next year. We'll definitely be looking forward to all the courses offered in 2013.

## Equipment

Over 140 companies made the trek to Mormon Lake for the Expo this year. By the time the event officially opened Friday morning, the exhibitor area was full of rigs, experts, and gear from every category and dozens of countries. There were plenty of Australian and African based companies showing their wares in addition to every big name in overlanding gear. There were also plenty of brand new companies, offering great gear that's fresh, exciting, and useful.

The expo is also a great time to test new gear while backup is nearby. We learned this the hard way when I set our brand new Indel-B fridge from Equipt to the wrong cutoff voltage (See the October issue for a full review of the fridge). As a result of my error, our TRD had a dead battery the next morning. Luckily Goal Zero was across the road from us and they let me field-test a 15 watt panel. It took about an hour, but the panel topped off the battery enough to start the engine. After setting the cutoff voltage to 'High' on the fridge, we used it without a problem for the rest of the trip.

The sheer volume of gear, toys, and 'kit' at the

Find out about the 2013 Expo  
at [www.overlandexpo.com](http://www.overlandexpo.com)



Overland Journal—Expeditions 7



CVTs Setup





expo is beyond the scope of a single article. It would simply be impossible to touch on everything we saw. We'll be covering our favorite products in future issues of both FJC Magazine and Tacoma Magazine, so stay tuned for much more information on all of our favorites from the 2012 Expo.

## Inspiration

Gear is great. Training is necessary. Inspiration though is perhaps the most exciting part of the Overland Expo. From the first time we set eyes on the camping and visitor areas great trucks showing off past adventures were everywhere. Once we got 'to work' and started chatting with attendees, exhibitors, and instructors our desire to drop everything and head out through the forest was almost overwhelming.

Some of the most inspiring information came from the talks and sessions scheduled throughout the event. With topics such as "Getting Involved while on an adventure", "Borders, Checkpoints & Bribes", and regional Q&As for the most popular overlanding destinations, the Expo provided ample experience, stories, and inspiration to help plan the next adventure. I was fortunate to be invited to sit on the "Getting Published" panel, where attendees chatted with several experts including Chris Collard from the Overland Journal, and Gary Wescott from

Turtle Expedition, among others. We answered questions about how to publish books, articles, and even blogs. I was honored to be on the panel with such iconic names in the industry and I came away with much more knowledge about the subject.

If the panels and attendees weren't enough, the exhibitors were a wealth of knowledge and experience. Equipt was there, having just returned from their 6 week Mundo Maya Expedition. Expeditions 7, Scott Brady and Greg Millers current adventure had just finished their Alaskan leg. These are just a couple examples of the amazing information and inspiration we found at the expo.

Many groups decided to overland enroute to the expo or afterwards. Jake Quinones from New Mexico Backroads led a group on an adventure prior to the event. We counted no less than six trips leaving either Sunday or Monday after the Expo headed in all directions. We even met up with a couple of other



FJC with Teardrop



BajaRack ready for adventure

## Roll over demo





FJC's on the north rim of the Grand Canyon during our mini-excursion over the Arizona Strip. Still others made the Expo a stop *during* their adventure.

Regardless of your current or future plans for overlanding, expeditions, or exploring, for a few short days every may, the Overland Expo becomes the center of our universe. You could call

it the SEMA show of overlanding, the CES (Consumer Electronics Show) of our hobby, or the Mecca of Off Highway Travel. Whether you ride, fly, drive, or hike – make plans to attend the 2013 Expo. It's been announced that Mormon Lake will once again be the venue, but dates have yet to be worked out. We look forward to seeing you there! ●



Shane getting ready for his panel



Winning class



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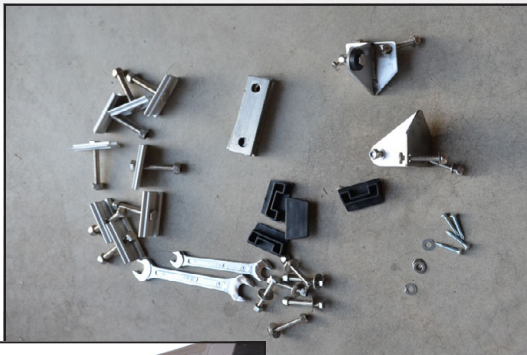
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# Cascadia Vehicle Tents/CVT Mt. Hood Roof Top Tent



Included hardware



Tent in the box

Rail mount



At the Overland Expo (See Page 6) we saw just about every make and model of roof top tent available. All the big names were there, along with several less known brands. Twelve months ago I would have included CVT (Cascadia Vehicle Tents) in the 'new' category, but after being in business just over a year, Bobby C u l p e p p e r and CVT are changing the way we think about roof top tents.

There's a reason Bobby uses the term 'vehicle'

in his company name instead of 'overland' 'expedition' or 'safari'. It all comes down to his philosophy of what a well built, economical, elevated tent should be: accessible. CVT has sold tents to FJC owners, FJ-40 owners, Jeep owners, Honda owners, Nissan owners, and I think I've even seen a Prius sporting a CVT. The point is that these tents are inexpensive enough for anyone to use, and will stand up to some very unfavorable conditions, such as a major beating in the Arizona wind.

Our tent arrived from CVT the day before the 2012 Overland Expo. Actually what I really mean is the 'night' before. We quite literally began installing



the tent on the BajaRack Utility Rack at 5 in the evening, luckily the sun was still out for a while and the job was pretty much done before dark.

The included instructions are very well done, although it seems that the same instructions are used for most CVT tents. Also, the changing room did not include any instructions, which made that setup interesting in the Arizona wind. The tent is mounted to the roof with an aluminum channel that holds bolts, which use an aluminum plate to wrap around your roof rack. Luckily this system works with most roof racks, including the BajaRack on our FJ as well as a custom built rack on our associates T100 (See the September issue of Tacoma Magazine for more).

Before mounting the tent, the aluminum channels have to be mounted to the tent floor. They're attached in three places along the length via bolts through the floor (don't worry, those bolts are covered by the mattress). This system works well and provides a very solid mount, but a couple of the holes in the floor of the tent didn't line up well. We even had to drill one out to get the channel properly mounted. Still, it didn't take long to get the channels mounted and we were ready to push the tent onto the roof.

At approximately 140lbs, this tent is much lighter than some, so you would think two able bodied men could lift it onto the FJ Cruiser without much effort. You would be wrong.

It's not that it's super heavy, but there are no 'handles' and an overland equipped FJ with rear bumper racks, a 3" lift, and a sloping driveway made this a bit of a pain to slide onto the roof. The truck even has a couple of dings on the top of the back door as proof of our difficulty. As it turns out though, this was the easy part of mounting the tent.

As much as I LOVE the BajaRack Utility rack (and I do, see page 34 for all the details), it's not super easy to mount accessories to. Since the middle of the rack is only a couple of inches from the roof (in order to keep the low profile) getting a wrench between the rack and the roof was a trying feat. Of course since I didn't have ratcheting wrenches at the time (that problem was solved on Father's Day), we had to turn each of the 8 nuts to mount the rack about 1/2 turn at a time. The result: torquing down the last nut just as the final sliver of dusk turned to night. I estimate that the lack of proper tools cost us at least an hour of wrenching time that night. Total install time: around 2 hours with the proper tools.

We were able to pop the tent fully open for the first time around 9pm the night before our 12+ hour drive to Arizona for the Overland Expo. We threw some sheets, blankets, and pillows into the tent, inspected the accessories (fly poles, changing room, stakes, etc), and folded her back up. The cover went on fairly easily after a little coaxing to get the zipper started. We learned very



FJC Before Expo



Fits bajarack perfectly



Front of the FJ



Point Sublime, North rim of the Grand Canyon





Quick and easy setup



Tent setup on Schnebly Hill Road



Schnebly Hill overlook



On Broken Arrow

quickly to tuck the extra tent fabric in very well, otherwise we spent several minutes unsticking the zipper for the cover.

The next morning I snapped a quick pic of the FJ ready and loaded for the Expo, and we headed south in a hurry. Quite surprisingly we didn't lose too much gas mileage (approximate 1mpg) with the added profile from the tent. Power loss on steep hills was noticeable, but not unbearable considering the weight of the tent and all of our overlanding gear. Overall I think it travels nice and is a good compliment to the FJ if a roof top tent is for you.

Less than 24 hours after we finished mounting the tent, Jim Akers (Managing editor for Tacoma Magazine) and I were on the North Rim edge of Schnebly Hill Road, overlooking Sedona, AZ. The first night produced a little wind, but nothing very noticeable. Once we had all the pics we needed, it was a 5 minute job to pack the tent up and head down the hill.

We had the opportunity to run Broken Arrow Trail while in Sedona before heading back north for the Expo, so since it's one of the most noteworthy trails in the state we couldn't pass it up. The FJ handled very well on the difficult parts

of the trail with the CVT up top. Going down "The Steps" I did notice the nose dropping a little quicker than normal, which is to be expected with an additional 160lbs on the roof. Overall I was happy with the way the FJ handled while carrying the tent. For overland and general camping use, this is a great option. However I



North Rim

wouldn't do terribly difficult trails while carrying the tent unless I upgraded to heavy duty coil springs.

Jim got to spend most of the first nights in the tent at the Expo. He learned a lot about the CVT, the FJ, and Arizona wind in his three nights up top. We estimate that the winds topped 60mph gusts overnight, and other than one fly rod fleeing at 3am, the tent held up perfectly. There was plenty of flapping in the wind, but



nothing broke. The only sign of the extreme conditions is a slightly deformed grommet where one of the fly poles goes into the tent frame. After surviving those few nights in the heat & wind, I'm certain this tent will be around for a long while.

After the Expo Angie & I decided to hit the Grand Canyon, since neither of us has ever had the opportunity. It also provided us a good excuse to check out the tent for family sleeping, which ended up being quite the challenge with a two year old. Unfortunately Brenden hasn't started sleeping in a toddler bed yet, so he's used to rolling around in a crib as much as he wants. That doesn't bode to well in a tent (even a large one like the

Mt. Hood). After he initially went to sleep OK, but once we were in the tent he rolled around and kicked both Angie & I repeatedly. Our one-night solution to this problem was to open the Pack-N-Play inside the tent; after that he was nice and contained.

The tent is now on the back of our friend Tim's T100 pickup, and will spend some time on Jim's Tacoma as well as a Ruger Trailer this summer. We'll spend plenty more nights in the CVT Mt. Hood this year, so watch our Facebook page and future issues for details on how she holds up.

Source:  
*Cascadia Vehicle Tents/CVT*  
<http://www.cascadiatents.com>  
541-312-8368 ●



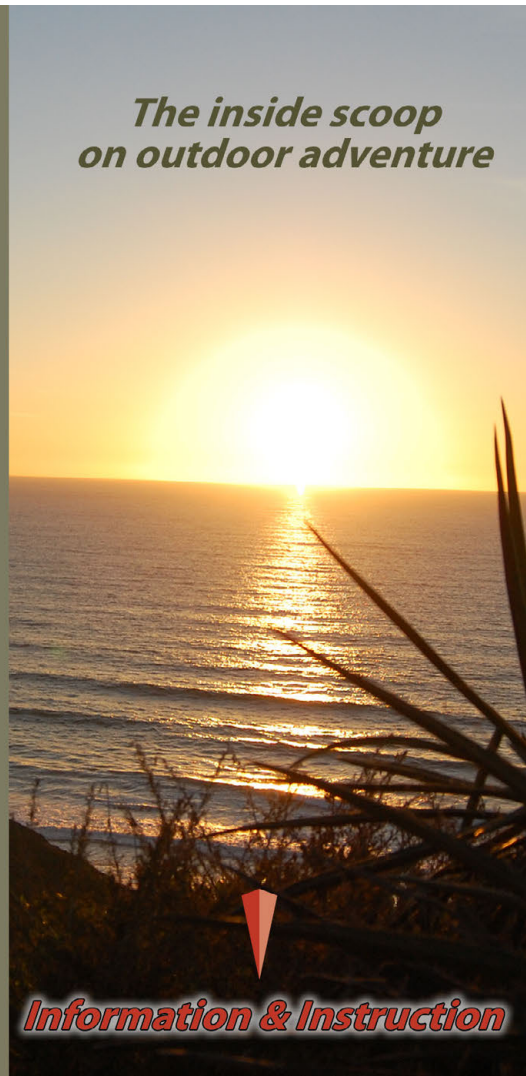
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# TEAM X ELLES... CRAZY?

*By Shane Williams*



**Half a world from home.**

**In the middle of the desert.**

**Two women with a truck, a map, and a compass.**

**Is this crazy?**

The Team X Elles motto 'Do The Crazy Thing' means more than just running a rally on another continent. It's about finding (or in some cases re-discovering) that inner love of adventure. It's about doing something not because it's easy, but because it's hard (to paraphrase JFK). Last year two women, mothers that barely knew each other, made the decision to experience adventure in a way most people could never imagine.

Julie Meddows initially heard about the Rallye Aicha des Gazelles (Gazelles Rally) when she saw a presentation from Emily Miller in 2011 at an event. Around the same time, Rachelle Croft heard about the adventure through her husband (Clay Croft from Expedition Overland). Both ladies thought it was a neat idea, but never imagined they could actually compete.

It wasn't until the 2011 SEMA show in Las Vegas, where Julie & Rachelle met for the first time, that this crazy idea was formed.

After chatting at the show and exchanging numbers, the two career oriented moms

started planning what would eventually become Team X Elles.

**So how to you prepare for a rally on another continent in just 4 months, when you have no racing experience?**



*Determination.*

Once Julie and Rachelle decided X Elles was going to happen, they did whatever they needed to in order to compete in the rally. Logistics, preparation, and training all had to be dealt with.

Sponsors, travel, timing, and of course family and careers had to be taken care of as well.



These ladies MADE the rally happen while inspiring many girls, women, and moms to do the crazy thing.

So, this rally is a fun romp through the desert in a fully supported SUV, right? Actually, no. The Rallye Aicha des Gazelles is one of the toughest competitions on the planet. What's more: men are not allowed to compete. Teams must consist of two (sometimes three) women, spending nine days in the desert. But it's much more serious than that.



With no GPS, no electronics, and no points of reference, teams must find their way across the Moroccan desert with only a compass and 50-year-old topographic maps. The teams are allowed to carry spare parts and recovery gear, but support trucks and mechanics are not permitted on the course. Teams must be completely self sufficient for the 10-15 hours of driving and navigating each day.

This is not a race, it's a rally, and unlike most rallies: time doesn't matter. This rally is all about distance. The goal is simple: the team with the least number of kilometers wins. Teams make choices while navigating from checkpoint to checkpoint: Go over the mountain or around it? Turn around or hope that their going in the right direction? Missing a checkpoint results in penalty KMs added to your total. The name of the game is conserving your distance. Many teams don't actually drive to the checkpoint, instead choosing to save their KMs and running the last few hundred meters to the checkpoint.

Their run down of the pace at which Rachelle & Julie prepared for the rally had my head

swirling during our interview. I can't imagine prepping a vehicle, taking care of the long list of arrangements and duties that must be done to compete on another continent, all while managing careers and families. This would be a difficult task for the most experienced teams, let alone two adventurous ladies that want to do the crazy thing.

In order to get the MaxTrax FJ Cruiser to the rally in Morocco, Team X Elles had to prep the truck, get it to New Jersey, and ship it to Paris through Belgium. The team then met the truck in Paris for the tech inspection, a very stressful time, before driving it to Morocco through Spain (via a 3 day ferry ride). That is a ton of time, money, and effort before the rally even started!

Luckily the Rallye (which began in 1990) has their system down. Each day they pick up and move an entire tent city (bivouac) from one location to the next, so the teams have a place to recover, eat, and sleep each night. Fuel and mechanics are provided (that is, they're included in the \$18,000 entry fee), but spare parts are not. Teams also must tell the mechanic what is wrong with the truck so it can be fixed overnight.

When I sat down with Rachelle & Julie at the Overland Expo, one thing I really wanted to know was what experiences during the rally changed their outlook. One on the top of the list for both ladies was the sense of accomplishment. "We can do this" and







“an adventure life after having children” were common themes. Of course there were challenges: Despite the presence of another US based team, the X Elles were basically on their own. They knew a little French, but clearly wished they knew more. They were lost for most of the first day of the rally, thankfully it was a practice day, but being lost in the desert at night with no GPS is not a good feeling.

There were so many successes though. Gazelle teams really do work together despite their intense competitive nature. The fridge in the back of the FJ carrying cold water was very popular with many other teams. MaxTrax were unheard of before Team X Elles arrived and were literally the only recovery device they needed. The only FJ Cruiser in the race also made the team very popular among the race officials and other teams.



After nine days in the desert (and overnight legs), Team X Elles finished their first Rallye. While they didn't finish first (only .6km separated first and second place), they did finish 24h among first timers and 80th overall. Out of 150+ rally teams, that's a success in anyone's book.

For the 2013 Rallye, Team X Elles will be adding another vehicle and two new members. Angie Williams is a long time off road enthusiast and has been driving our FJ Cruiser for nearly five years. Angie will be driving the MaxTrax FJ Cruiser, with Julie Meddows as the navigator. Hailey Morrison is Expedition Overland's intern from New Zealand, and though she works mainly on the production and marking side of the show, she's an avid petrol head and studies at maps in her spare time. Hailey will be the navigator for the second truck with team mate Rachelle doing the driving.

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## Interested in being a sponsor?



Are you interested in sponsoring the X Elles for the 2013 Rallye? You can visit [www.teamxelles.com](http://www.teamxelles.com) and donate via Paypal. Any amount is greatly appreciated and you'll be listed on the Team X Elles website as a sponsor! Details on corporate sponsorship will be available soon!



Team X Elles continues their original motto: "Do the crazy thing!". This drives them into the unknown, to discover more, to survive, to accomplish the unthinkable. As women, moms, students, and career oriented ladies, the X Elles yearn for adventure.

Team X Elles is headed back to Morocco.

Back to adventure.

Doing the crazy thing . . . Together. ●

## Meet The Team



**Rachelle Croft**  
Driver

Rachelle was born and raised in beautiful Missoula, MT. She began driving at the age of 5 with her dad and has loved it ever since. She and her husband have been married for over 8 years, have 3 boys and reside in Bozeman, MT. She has always had a love for adventure and a love for life. This will be her 2nd Gazelle Rallye and she can't wait to put what she learned last year into practice.



**Julie Meddows**  
Navigator

Julie is a Social Marketing Consultant and enjoys seeing things go viral! Julie is a native Iowan who met her husband, Benjamin while pursuing a Master of Arts in Community Arts Management from the University of Illinois at Springfield. Julie has extensive tourism and arts background and is a natural in marketing and sales. Julie and Ben have one daughter who just started Pre-School and enjoys traveling and exploring the world. When Julie was pregnant, she was diagnosed with Melanoma after tanning in a tanning bed. She hopes that she can make a difference in people's lives through her experiences of Melanoma, motherhood, arts and social media. Julie and her family recently moved to Las Vegas, Nevada.



**Angie Williams**  
Driver

Angie was introduced to the offroading community when she met her husband Shane in 2003. Since then, her interest and involvement have grown exponentially. They now own 2 Toyota based publications, FJC Magazine and Tacoma Magazine. She juggles motherhood, a successful career as a Surgical First Assistant and the desire to experience life to the fullest on a daily basis. Shane and Angie live in beautiful Colorado Springs, with their 2 year old son, Brenden. The Rallye de Gazelles was the next logical step in Angie's quest for adventure. Many women feel that it's impossible to explore and do extraordinary things after having a family. Angie's solution is simple, just take your family with you!



**Hailey Morrison**  
Navigator

Hailey spent most of her childhood on motorbikes, which was avidly encouraged by her Dad. She decided motorsports were for her when she would watch her cousins race and saw the success of her cousin Brendon Hartley in open wheel racing. Hailey has been biding her time, waiting for her opportunity to get out there, and her time came when she heard about the Gazelle Rally through her good friend Rachelle.



# FJ Cruiser: Zombie Evasion Edition

By Bill S.



I blame it all on my brother-in-law Dax. He just had to go and buy a black FJ back in 2007. Over the subsequent four plus years I have been subjected to a series of pictures showing his FJ in all sorts of thrilling, precarious-looking situations, not to mention pictures of camping and cavorting throughout the Texas countryside. This constant harassment (damn you FaceBook!)

caused me to reminisce about the rough looking CJ-7 I owned back in college, with a suspension lift and knobby mud terrains, and about the Toyota SR5 truck I had before that, with a hideous body lift and tires that were way too big for the little four cylinder engine. Being an early 40's, mid-career, married man with a wife and two young, boisterous daughters, I figured it was just about the right time for a quasi-mid-life crisis vehicle. Before long, I had traded in my well-mannered and perfectly practical Honda Pilot for a 2012 Army Green FJ Cruiser. It seemed the rational thing to do at the time. That was October 2011. Little did I know that I would spend the next eight months researching, planning, and ultimately building the FJ that I wished I could have bought directly from Toyota.



Don't get me wrong, the FJ that I drove away from the showroom was a great vehicle. Killer good looks, trim and fit, with both agility and brawn (rather like its owner, if I do say so myself, although others may have a different opinion on the "trim and fit" part). I bought a fully loaded 2012 FJ, with locking rear diff and A-TRAC, as well as all the upgrade packages they could squeeze in. However, what I really wanted was the mythical FJ Cruiser "Overland Edition." My only other option was a Trail Teams Edition FJ. The Trail Teams FJs are nice, but where's the winch to pull me out the muck when I've exercised questionable judgment on trail? Where's the second battery system to run an obnoxiously large 12v refrigerator for my Yuengling lagers? Where's the sturdy



bumper so that I don't have to slow down for all the deer I see driving home from work each evening? No, the Trail Teams just would not do the job. I decided I needed to create the FJ that Toyota should have offered to my particular mid-life-crisis demographic.

My decision to create an "Overland Edition" FJ happened to coincide with the start of a new season of *The Walking Dead*. Watching the show, I frequently thought, "Boy, they sure could really use a sturdier vehicle, which would make running down zombies considerably more safe, and also allow them to flee across the nearest rock strewn field when the previously living get too thick." Thus, my "Overland Edition" FJ quickly morphed into a "Zombie Evasion Edition" FJ, which in my mind was almost exactly the same, but even more fun. With the overall approach locked down, I began the planning phase.



The intent was to build an FJ that I could still use as a daily driver without being gawked at when walking into work (well, at least not too much...), but which was still highly functional and reliable in an overland/expedition mode of use. In essence, something that could get me back and forth to work and be reasonably behaved in doing so, but that could also get me, my lovely wife and two little girls out of dodge right quick if the dead do happen to begin rising from their eternal resting places. I also wanted it to look and feel as much like a Toyota-designed and created version of the FJ as possible, i.e., not an "in your face," over-the-top, look-at-my-big-lights-and-big-tires rig (my success in the latter goal is debatable).

This thinking drove a number of key decisions. First, everything would be as "low profile" as possible while still fulfilling its essential function in a robust way. Second, no loud colors or stickers; those wouldn't be on Trail Teams, and therefore could not be on this FJ either. Third, lifted, yes, but just enough to enhance the FJ's already very capable set up. Fourth, wheels and tires that don't scream "my #\$\$%@ is bigger than yours!"



To my wife's horror, my first upgrade was to gut the rear of the FJ, including the rear door, to install a double dose of Dynamat. I had noticed significant exhaust and road noise from the rear of the FJ during my first two months of driving it, and figured it would only get worse with more aggressive tires. The Dynamat reduced the noise and vibration considerably, so it was well worth the effort.





I then moved on to the suspension, I opted for a 2" Old Man Emu lift (heavy) front and back. The heavy version was selected in anticipation of front and rear bumper upgrades, in addition to the other weight-adding mods. I also wanted to add as much cargo hauling capacity as possible. The OME lift consisted of heavy springs front and rear, couple with Nitro Charger Sport struts/shocks. In the front, I also added Total Chaos upper control arms and upgraded spindle gussets. In the rear I upgraded to General Armor lower control arms. Holy cow are those things beefy. With this suspension set up, I figure I've added considerably to the ability of the rig in terms of performance, robustness, and load carrying ability.

I should pause here to note that when I use phrases like "I added" and "I installed," I of course mean that the expensive and questionable modification described was "installed by JT, a highly skilled and meticulous technician at OK4WD in Stewartsville, New Jersey, and his detail oriented and customer friendly service manager Steve." All kidding aside, the guys at OK4WD did almost all the heavy lifting here, including installation of the new suspension, bumpers, roof rack, lighting, and electrical upgrades, and they did a solid job of it.

Making use of all those suspension upgrades are BF Goodrich All Terrain T/A KO LT285/75R16 tires and Toyota TRD Wheels. Remember that I had made the silly decision to have the rig look like it came right from Toyota? That shortsighted decision resulted in a frustrating series of interactions with my Toyota dealership and Toyota itself. I was intent on purchasing those cool, anthracite gray TRD alloy wheels that ship on the Trail Teams Edition FJ, thinking this would not only meet my "low profile" objective, but also my "designed and sold by Toyota" objective. So, I naively called the dealership where I purchased the FJ and placed a parts order for six TRD-special-edition-super-cool-gray-wheels. They accepted my order and assured me they would have them in a week or so. Well, seven weeks and a number of polite, but increasing frustrating, calls later, they in fact had obtained exactly one out of six wheels. Then, if you can believe it, Toyota called them and made them ship that one back to the warehouse!



It turns out that Toyota had implemented a policy of not selling those super-duper-cool-grey-TRD-wheels to anyone unless they have a VIN number from a Trail Teams FJ. Well, not to be deterred in my quest to build my ultimate mid-life crisis FJ just the way I wanted it, I changed my order to the silver version of that same wheel, which Toyota was more



than happy to sell to me. Exhibiting what my wife has occasionally, and charitably, characterized as “a bit stubborn” way, I took those beautiful brandy new wheels to the powder coaters and had them stripped bare and re-painted just the right color. For all that hassle, they came out flawless and beautiful, and dare I say, even better than the special edition wheels I had originally wanted (take that you supply chain control freaks!).

Just in case those big tires run a little low on pressure, or in case I need to inflate a dinghy to flee across a lake or river from an approaching throng of the living dead, I added an ARB on-board air compressor, which is nestled perfectly in the engine compartment just behind the passenger side headlight. The compressor is switched on and off using a custom “Super Secret Spy Mode” switch in the center console (I had to include some elements to keep my daughters interested).

To the front of the FJ, I added an ARB bull bar, which, after reading the multiple stories of head-on collisions with deer on the FJ Cruiser forums, was the clear winner of the available after-market bumpers. Also, the ARB bumper is reasonably “low key” compared to many of the other available options. Installed in the bumper are amber PIAA fog lights and a Warn 9.5xp winch with a Spydura line, which results in a considerable weight savings over the traditional steel line. I then added an ARB rear bumper, which was released just in time for this build, as the previous version wasn’t certified for use with late model FJ’s.

To the rear I also added Manik rear taillight guards. It was quite a task tracking those down, given that they haven’t been made for several years now, but I much preferred their look to the versions offered by current vendors. *Thank you E-Bay.*

In terms of side and undercarriage protection, I went BudBuilt all the way. I added a full set of skid plates underneath, including one for the rear differential. I also opted for Bud’s bump-out sliders with full tread plates.

In keeping with my “low profile” approach, I opted for a Gobi Stealth roof rack. Paul at Gobi worked with me to modify the rack to fit my selected lighting. I opted for VisionX EVO Prime single stack LED lights all round. Facing forward is a 17”, 8,600 lumen unit with a 20 degree beam, flanked by two 5”, 1,720 lumen units,



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each with a 40 degree beam. This lighting set up necessitated moving the front support bars on the Gobi rack a bit. This gives me more than 12,000 lumens facing forward, excluding the PIAA fog lights in the front bumper and the FJ's standard headlights. Facing rearward are two more of the 5", 40 degree units. For the rear facing rack lights, Paul came up with a great idea, which was to create a dropped cradle for each light. The result is that you can lay long flat cargo (like plywood to secure your windows in the zombie apocalypse, assuming Home Depot is still open and not overrun with walking puss bags at the time) without having it rest on the lights themselves. To access the roof rack, I also picked up a Gobi ladder for the rear door.

Thinking that fleeing the zombie hordes may occasionally necessitate fording moderately deep bodies of water, streets flooded by knocked over fire hydrants, and the like, it seemed prudent to add a snorkel. I managed to lay my hands on one of the first three ARB Safari Snorkels to hit US shores once the new version for late model FJs was released earlier this year. I may add the "scuba mod" at some point to ensure that I can wallow in ponds from time to time if needed.

The only other exterior modifications were blacking out the front grill, mirrors, and door handles, with PlastiDip, which seems to be holding up well so far. The PlastiDip finish matches the snorkel, roof rack, and rear taillight guards nicely, giving the coordinated "from the factory" look I was going for.

Interior upgrades started with installing a Dirty Parts second battery kit with an Odyssey PC1500DT deep cycle battery, which is controlled by a custom Dirty Parts three-way switch located in a stock switch position to the left of the steering wheel. The battery system is coupled with an AutoMeter Phantom voltmeter, which is located just



below the air vent on the passenger side, and which is switched on and off using a custom "Zombie Response Mode" switch in the center console. Larry at Dirty Parts provided essential guidance and suggestions for this portion of the project. At Larry's suggestion, I included an S-POD/The Source set-up, coupled with an aluminum six-switch plate in the cabin with custom switch faceplates made by Dirty Parts. The switches control the five lights on the roof rack, the PIAA fog lights, three additional 12v accessory outlets installed in the bottom rear of the center console, and two 12v accessory outlets installed in the rear cargo area above the stock A/C outlet. All the additional outlets are Toyota original parts to maintain the "from the factory" look throughout.

To round out my storage, I added a SpringTail Solutions FJ Straddle, which sits across the front console, and a SpringTail Solutions FJ Side Rack, which attaches to the flat area above the driver's side rear



wheel in the cargo area. The products provide MOLLE-like attachment points, to which I have mounted various Maxpedition products. The Maxpedition items are extremely rugged and are likely to stand up well to the rigors of the zombie apocalypse. Finally, Mario at Adventure Trailers built a custom rear storage unit. I opted for a one-drawer design, with open storage spaces on each side sized to fit .50 cal ammo cans. This somehow felt “just right” given that the FJ is Army Green. Also, I needed a solution that allowed access to the stock A/C and custom 12v accessory outlets in the cargo area, and this approach worked nicely. In another nod to my girls, the storage unit includes two “super secret spy compartments,” which are accessible only when the rear seats are folded down. It’s still unclear to me how “Super Secret Spies” fit in with evading Zombies, but my oldest daughter, a rather precocious five and half year old, has assured me that they are, and that I’m a bit silly for not having realized that apparently obvious fact sooner.

To give the build a finished, “special edition” look, Joel Ellis at Ellis Precision created some custom “Zombie Evasion Edition” badges for me, as well as a custom shift knob. The designs were based on art work that Vince Peterson, Volhoo on FJ CruiserForums.com, created for me. These are the elements that really tie the build together, in my opinion.



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To top things off, I ended up winning an ARB Simpson III tent in a raffle at OK4WD. Word has it that the walking dead don't climb well, so we should be all right up there if we need to stop for the night. Besides, it seems like the tent would make an excellent platform from which to plink zombies at close range with a .22 pistol should we need to clear the camp site before starting on our eggs and bacon.

In the zombie apocalypse, mobility could turn out to be very important, and I think this set up will serve our little family well. And, even in the unfortunate event that there is no zombie apocalypse, I think I'm good to go for any remote camping or expedition-type outing I could possibly imagine.

Thus concludes Phase I of my "Zombie Evasion Edition FJ Cruiser." Phase II will likely include an expansive communications and GPS package, a solar charging set-up to supplement the dual-battery system, a second gas tank from Man-a-Fre, a matching trailer from Adventure Trailers, IR illuminators for lights-out night driving with night vision goggles, and, perhaps, a slushy machine of some type. A budget has been created, reviewed, and submitted to management (read: "my lovely wife"), but approvals have not yet been received. A man can hope. ●



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# An Off-Road Driver's Guide to CB Radios

By Pat Haggerty  
[www.rightchannelradios.com](http://www.rightchannelradios.com)

The CB radio has been a reliable communication tool since its wide adaptation in the 1970s. Today, most organized trail rides require participants to have their own CB radio as they enable all parties to remain aware of trail conditions, hazards, and delays.

## Choosing your CB Equipment

When choosing a CB radio for your vehicle, it is important to understand that all radios transmit with the same amount of power. The FCC limits CB transmission power to 4 watts, so choosing a CB radio (<http://www.rightchannelradios.com/cb-radios.html>) is less about the power and more about how the radio fits your vehicle and your communication needs.



## Picking a CB Radio

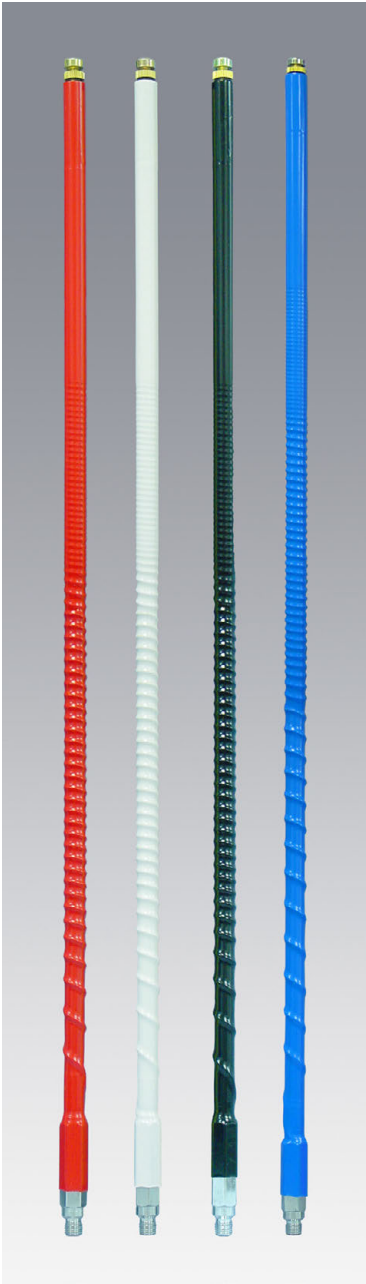
Because off-road vehicles lend to have small cabs, a compact CB radio is often a good fit. The most popular compact CB radios are the Uniden 510 PRO XL and the Cobra 75 WX ST. The Uniden 510 is an extremely durable radio that offers reliable performance at an affordable price. The Cobra 75 is a more unique radio that has the controls and speaker built into the microphone. While both of these radios are a good fit for compact vehicles, they don't have all the features found in a larger CB. If you have ample cab space and are looking for a full-size CB with all the bells and whistles, the Cobra 29 is a great choice.



## Picking a CB Antenna

Choosing the proper antenna for your vehicle is very important, as it is the antenna that determines your range - not the radio. Generally speaking, the larger the antenna the better range you'll experience. For best results, you will want an antenna that is mounted with at least half of the antenna above the roof. There are many different types and brands to choose from, but for off-road use two antennas stand out.





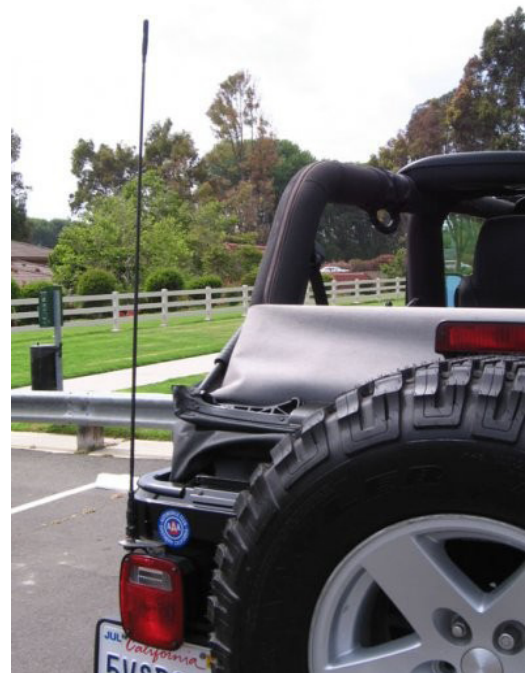
The Firestik FS CB antenna is very popular in the off-road community as it is built tough and is able to transmit long distances. The Wilson Flex is another popular antenna that can bend up to 180 degree without breaking. The Flex is ideal for people who drive in heavy wooded areas or places with low clearance. While it offers superior flexibility and protection against breaking, the FLEX can't transmit as far as the Firestik FS.

### Mount

When choosing a location to mount your CB antenna, you will need to ensure the mounting location is metal and well grounded. The CB antenna uses the chassis of your vehicle to create a ground plane and transmit signals. If your mounting location is not grounded, your CB will not perform properly.



Popular mounting locations include the hood rail, front and rear fenders, bumpers, and pickup truck bed rails. Multiple mounts are manufactured specifically for all of these locations, and many are designed for specific vehicles to ensure the perfect fit.





In addition to the radio, antenna and mount, you will need a CB coax cable and an antenna stud. Be sure that the coax cable you choose has an end that is compatible with your stud. Most CB mounts include a PL-259 (screw on) antenna stud, but some mounting locations, specifically hoods, don't have enough room for a screw-on connection. For these mount, you will need a ring or terminal end coax cable.

### Installation

Once you've selected all your components, it's time to begin installation. This process is relatively straightforward, and as long as you have antenna mounting location with a solid ground you shouldn't have any trouble. Mount your CB radio in your cab, route the coax cable to the antenna, and connect everything up. If possible, we recommend attaching the CB radio power leads directly to the battery to reduce electrical interference when transmitting or receiving.

### Tuning your CB antenna

Once you've attached everything, the final step is tuning your CB antenna. All CB antennas need to be adjusted to match the vehicles chassis and mounting location, as the ideal length differs for every vehicle. While this process might sound intimidating, it is actually quite simple.

To tune your CB antenna, you will need an SWR meter. Full-size CB radios, such as the Cobra 29, have a built-in SWR meter while most compact radios do not. If you have a compact CB, you can purchase an external meter (<http://www.rightchannelradios.com/cb-accessories/cb-swr-meter.html>) for around \$26. Once you have the meter installed, you can test your SWR while incrementally raising or lowering the adjustable tip on your antenna until the SWR reading is as low as possible. Good SWR levels are close to 1.0 and anything under 2.0 is fairly decent. If your SWR is over 3.0, you have an installation problem, likely caused by a bad ground.

*For detailed antenna tuning instructions please refer to this video tuning guide. (<http://www.rightchannelradios.com/tuning-cb-antenna-adjusting-swr>)*



### Testing Your CB Radio

Before using the radio for your first trail ride, it's a good idea to test it out with a friend. Drive away from each other while communicating to determine the range you can expect out on the trail. Keep in mind that hills and canyons will significantly reduce your range. If you're having a difficult time getting the range you want, you may need to make some changes. A higher mounting location or a longer, better antenna will likely help.

### About the Author

Pat Haggerty is the sales manager at Right Channel CB Radios (<http://www.rightchannelradios.com>) and is committed to providing customers with the best CB service, resources, and products available. Right Channel Radios specializes in mobile CB radios, antennas, and accessories for drivers of all vehicles.



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# Ride N Drive

*By Paul Thompson | [www.lastgreatroadtrip.com](http://www.lastgreatroadtrip.com)*

Last month Paul was among a group of online journalists invited by Cooper Tire to attend their exclusive 'Ride-N-Drive' event in San Antonio. Excited at the opportunity to test some of their latest designs (despite no FJs in the test fleet), Paul worked all the details out, packed his bags, and headed for Texas.

He was kind enough to share some of his best photos with us, featuring jeeps in various predicaments running Cooper Tires. Paul has already published the first of his articles on the adventure, so head over to [www.LastGreatRoadTrip.com](http://www.LastGreatRoadTrip.com) for more details!











## Recovery By: BubbaRope®

We've covered the contents of a good recovery kit in the past: gloves, quality shackles, tree saver straps, winch controller, and recovery traps. Many manufacturers offer standard recovery kits that are a one size fits all, basic setup which is perfect for most situations. Let's face it, most people just don't get stuck all that often, right?

Well, when you do get stuck, hopefully you're with a group (since we know it's bad form to wheel alone – especially on difficult trails). Since stuck happens, you want to make sure you have great gear to keep the



situation as stress free as possible. The kits we've seen don't always come with a true dynamic snatch strap, one of the most important pieces of your kit.

Last year at SEMA Show as we were browsing the booths, we came across an oddly named, yet very interesting recovery strap option: Bubba Rope. Like other kinetic (dynamic) ropes, Bubba Ropes come in a variety of strengths: From ATV recovery ropes rated at 7,400lbs to the Extreme Bubba with a rating of 131,500lbs. Most users will go with the standard 4x4 size: 7/8" 20 foot rope rated at 28,600lbs. That rating is in the range for similar straps from other vendors, but it's more than the rating that makes the Bubba Rope unique.



The dual-core rope is dipped in a poly-metric base that soaks into the fibers of the rope, so the entire rope is protected to ensure years of hard use. Standard ropes and straps don't have this level of protection, so many times they will wear

out prematurely if used in dirty, sandy environments. Bubba Ropes can also include 'Gatorize', which is an extra-strong coating on the ends of the rope to help prevent wear from shackles and other hardware. Perhaps our favorite feature is the ability to get a Bubba Rope in a variety of colors. Blue is the standard color, but for \$20 more you can get red, orange, yellow, green, or black colored ends.



We took a standard blue Bubba Rope with us on a recent trip to the mountains outside Denver, along with a Toyota

T100 with open differentials. As luck would have it, there was a very narrow section of trail that the T100 just could squeak up, so we were able to get a little use out of the Bubba Rope. Of course we were able to yank the truck up the obstacle with no problem, and the Bubba Rope went back into its mesh duffle bag. It was certainly not the most exciting recovery ever, but I'm sure we'll be stuck plenty in the near future so we can test it a little more.

At a retail price of \$139.00, the Bubba Rope costs twice as much as standard options. With the added features other straps can't touch, it seems like the cost can be justified. If you're in an area with lots of snow, mud, or sand, the Bubba Rope could be an essential part of your gear. Use it, put it to the test, and let the added features prolong the life of your rope.

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# Utility Rack Update

Over the last year or so, we've used the Utility rack as it was meant to be used. It's hauled lumber, skis and snowboards, gear, Mini FJ Cruisers, and of course the CVT tent. It's held up perfectly with the powder coat not showing any

signs of wear. While it took a while to get used to the flat look on the truck, at this point the FJ would look weird with a curved rack. The attachment points are perfect for straps, clamps, and mounts of all types. Of course our Thule ski/snowboard rack took a little coaxing to fix properly, it served us well all season.

The extra length the Utility rack provides proved essential when mounting the large tent. The 72" tent would cover the entire length of most racks, but we were able to keep the Hi-Lift and Rigid LED light bar mounted along with the tent. A low profile rack is always going to be a pain to mount things to, with only a couple inches of clearance above the roof. Luckily we invested



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in ratcheting wrenches, which makes mounting/un-mounting items much easier. In reality, most people won't be swapping out items on the roof that often so this really is a non-issue.



At \$725, this could be the best rack available for the FJ. If you even think you'll need to haul more than just gear on top of your truck, definitely take a close look at the BajaRack Utility Rack.

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# In The News

Ordinarily a new website would not merit an In The News entry, but in the case of FunTreks Guidebooks, we think you'll agree it's pretty substantial. The new site is full of great features, but most importantly (in our opinion) is the high-quality PDF previews of ALL of their books. This feature is similar to Amazon's "Look Inside" feature, but FunTreks is providing a PDF so you can actually print and use their preview! Each book includes three trails (one easy, one moderate, one difficult) so that you can get a feel for how the books are organized.

Some other great features of the new site:

- All books are currently on sale.
- Each book page includes a slideshow from that book
- Latest reviews for each book are on the same page as well
- The FunTreks Blog has been re-organized
- Their newsletter is now bi-monthly and in more of a 'magazine' format (we helped with this)
- Quick links to FREE GPS Waypoint downloads and their GPS Data cards for your electronic navigation needs.

See [www.FunTreks.com](http://www.FunTreks.com) for more



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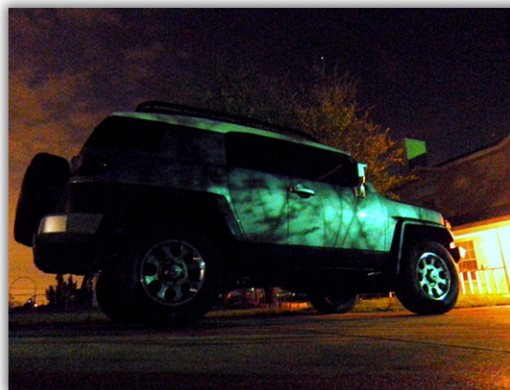
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